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VOL. X APRIL, 1944 NO. 2

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NATURE WRITERS IN THE UNITED STATES

Agatha Boyd Adams

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA PRESS
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AGATHA BOYD ADAMS

University of North Carolina Library

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A GOODLY COMPANY

Of this fair volume which we World do name,
If we the sheets and leaves could turn with care,
Of him who it corrects and did it frame,
We clear might read the art and wisdom rare.
—WILLIAM DRUMMOND

They tell us that after the bombing of Britain, flowers long since forgotten by gardeners bloomed suddenly in exposed cellars; seeds that had lain dormant for many years defied the ugliness of the Blitz with gaiety and fragrance. Perhaps there is a parable in this odd little news item; without pushing the analogy too far, it represents something of what this outline has attempted to do: to bring to readers of the present the fresh and vivid enjoyment of nature that is part of our national inheritance.

For the purposes of this outline, nature writers have been taken to mean those who have shown especial delight in writing about nature, rather than scientists and naturalists in the stricter definition. In some cases they overlap, and the great scientist is also gifted in recording his observations. But our choice here has tended, with few exceptions, toward writers who have set down their pleasure in observing and learning about the natural world, rather than those who have labored for the advancement of science. No attempt has been made to include the poets, those most sensitive of interpreters of nature. The scope of choice has been obviously somewhat limited by the availability of books; but it is hoped that enough are studied here to indicate the range of this type of writing, and the keen pleasure to be derived from reading it.

The preparation of this bulletin has been in a sense a deliberate escape from a surfeit of contemporary books. Perhaps it may serve a similar purpose for those who would like to substitute however briefly the sound of wings for the roar of planes.

Readers who wish a more extensive bibliography than can be furnished here are referred to Edwin Teale's *Bypaths to Adventure,* or to Herbert Faulkner West's charming little book *The Nature Writers, a Guide to Richer Reading.*

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CHAPTER I

THE TRADITION

'Twixt new earth and heaven new
He hath traced and holds the clue;
Number his delights ye may not;
Fleets the year but these decay not.
—Edith Thomas

In *Green Laurels* Donald Culross Peattie reminds us that there were no nature writers among the ancients, and few in the Middle Ages; perhaps the medieval herbalists were the earliest predecessors of nature writing as we now understand it. The herbalists were not artists at writing, but they had fellow craftsmen who could translate love of nature into the most exquisite and enduring art forms. On the pillars of Gothic cloisters and cathedrals, on the sides of choir stalls and the arches of chapels, are to be found in carven wood and delicately chiseled stone a profusion of tiny animals and birds, leaf and bud and petal, recorded with loving precision. And the backgrounds of medieval tapestries are often sprinkled with innumerable small flowers, intricately woven daisies, lilies, and all the flowers of legend. The famous Unicorn tapestries now in the Cloisters in New York show a wonderful profusion of flowers. It is this kind of painstaking observation and artistically expressed delight in the ever new yet ever recurring forms of nature that we seek nowadays in writing; a few of those who have done it best in this country are grouped together here.

Perhaps in the entire history of the world no people have ever had a more profoundly exciting view of nature than the early arrivals in this country. Before them lay a wilderness of infinite variety, of coasts and savannahs, valleys and mountains, with a bewildering abundance of new kinds of fruit and flowers and trees and animals. The accounts of some of the early explorers still bear the fresh glory of that discovery. No wonder that such men as Bartram, Michaux and Audubon felt that time was all too short and travel all too slow for seeing, enjoying, and recording this multiple-faceted new world. Many later writers have tried to re-create that early wonder; in the first chapter of *The Forest and the Fort* Hervey Allen has given a memorable picture of the American wilderness, and in *Western Star,* by Stephen Vincent

Benét, the reader sees anew the capes and forests of the Virginia shore with the eyes of sea-weary Londoners. But perhaps, as Donald Peattie suggests, we can best recapture that vision by going back to the journals of the first nature-lovers who set down by lantern or camp-fire light their day-to-day discoveries, when such now familiar sights as the woodpecker or the elfin-tinted kalmia were incredibly new.

1. BEFORE THE NEW WORLD

Green Laurels, by Donald Culross Peattie. Chapters I-VIII.

Discuss briefly Chapters I and II.

Give some account of the medieval herbalists, and their connection with modern nature-writing. Mention some present-day herbalists. What South American herbalists are mentioned in *Green Laurels?*

Discuss Linnaeus as he is presented here. Describe the Lapland journey as Peattie tells it. Summarize his life work. Show how he led the way for all future lovers of flowers and plants, whether they be botanists, naturalists, or just plain gardeners. Note especially the delight in nature implicit in the quotations from Linnaeus.

Mention some of the successors of Linnaeus, with a short statement of the significance of each.

2. THE AMAZING NEW WORLD

Green Laurels, by Donald Culross Peattie (Chapters IX and X)

Describe the interest aroused in England by the flora and fauna of the newly discovered lands; the garden of the Duchess of Beaufort; the English patronage of such early collectors as Josselyn and John Bannister.

Tell the stories of John and William Bartram. Were they both what Peattie likes to call "born plantsmen"? Expand the meaning of this phrase. How were they typical of the new world?

Note that André Michaux has never had a biographer—a real opportunity for a writer there. Peattie tells us something of his story. Give an account of his travels in the East before coming to America.

Comment especially on his explorations of the Shenandoah Valley and the Carolinas. What were his especial interests? His contribution to knowledge?

3. HOW IT LOOKED TO THEM

American Memory, by Henry Beston

From this excellent anthology, read aloud some of the first hand accounts of the American wilderness by early travelers. The following are suggested: "The New Country," p. 29-33; "The Cataract of Niagara," p. 144-5; "A Tempest in Georgia," p. 150-1; "Bee-hunting in the American Forest," p. 153-4; "The Romantic Wilderness," p. 155-6.

CHAPTER II

"A WILD AND POETICAL VISION OF THE HEART OF THE NEW WORLD"

> "All the great ornithologists have been poets in deed if not in word. Audubon is a notable case in point, who, if he had not the tongue or pen of the poet, certainly had the eye and ear and heart . . . and the singleness of purpose, the enthusiasm, the unworldliness, the love, that characterize the divine race of bards."
>
> —JOHN BURROUGHS

Perhaps the clearest and the most entranced eyes that beheld the American wilderness were those of John James Audubon. One of his most recent biographers has remarked that the light in his paintings is the light of morning, with every detail mint-new and fresh. He saw everything, from the sweep of an eagle's wing to the tiny freckles on the shell-pink corolla of the mountain laurel, from the webbing of a leaf to the savage thrust of the attacking rattlesnake. His great purpose, to which he dedicated himself with singular artistic integrity, was to record the whole of this strange vast beauty. Birds were his theme, his guides, weaving in their flight the basic pattern of his long work, but no one can study his paintings without realizing that birds were only a paramount interest among a thousand interests; that his passionate concern for fern and grass, for bud and leaf and calyx, was close indeed to his concern for birds. His backgrounds often have the fascinating detail of a painting by Mantegna or Leonardo, leading the observer deep into a miniature far-away land.

Even aside from his magnificent achievement, Audubon's story has every element of interest, from his mysterious birth and ancestry to his final triumph over all the odds of poverty, doubt, frustration and enmity. No novelist could spin a more beautifully typical yet more-than-life-size yarn of the American backwoods, the huntsman of the frontier, follower of wild rivers and long trails, and teller of tall tales. Although not really a nature-writer, as a supremely gifted interpreter of nature, and as the subject of two interesting recent biographies, he belongs in this goodly company. No one can become familiar with the life and works of Audubon without having their minds quickened to fresh appreciation of our native woods.

1. A SALUTE TO AUDUBON

Singing in the Wilderness, by Donald Culross Peattie

Review briefly the note on Audubon given in *Green Laurels*, used in the preceding chapter, showing how Peattie places him in relation to the long line of naturalists. Relate him especially to such early American naturalists as Wilson, Rafinesque, Michaux.

Peattie devotes more attention to his early life than does Constance Rourke. Comment on this method of fictionized biography. Outline his origins and early life.

Peattie is a nature writer himself. Discuss his sympathy with the subject of this biography. How successful is he in re-creating for us the American wilderness as it was in Audubon's day?

The portrayal of Lucy in *Singing in the Wilderness* seems particularly successful. Relate her role in Audubon's ups and downs.

In reviewing these two biographies together, develop the main outlines of Audubon's life from *Singing in the Wilderness*, and depend upon Rourke's *Audubon* for an evaluation of his work.

2. THE HEART OF THE NEW WORLD

Audubon, by Constance Rourke

Discuss in some detail Audubon's artistic integrity, his singleness of purpose, as shown throughout his life. Is this typical of all great artists? Was he at times selfish and even ruthless in pursuing his purpose?

Describe his methods of work: of obtaining specimens, and of painting them. What trials and errors did he make? What did he find his most successful medium?

Miss Rourke gives throughout her study a thoughtful analysis of the quality of Audubon's work. What made it distinctive, original? Study the illustrations, or if possible some of the larger plates, and comment on the intrinsic elements of their beauty.

Does Miss Rourke consider Audubon more artist than scientist? In which category does Peattie place him?

How does Miss Rourke deal with the Dauphin legend?

Note her effectiveness in rendering the American wilderness as it must have appeared to Audubon.

Comment on the essentially American qualities in Audubon's story.

Compare these two biographies, bringing out the excellences of each. Do they make you want to know more of Audubon?

Additional Reading:

American Memory, by Henry Beston. "The Arrival of the Pigeons," by J. J. Audubon, p. 286-8.

CHAPTER III

"IN THE ABUTMENT OF A RAINBOW"

. . . Concord had a wilder man who played the hermit then;
A busy mole who loved the woods and shunned all common men:
Whose piercing eyes and mind beheld the wonder of the trees,
And never read "the Times" at all, but "the Eternities."

—Alfred Kreymborg

The life stories of Audubon and of Thoreau are in essence similar, though the former ranged the great rivers and green depths of the frontier wilderness, and the other lived out his intense years of meditation in a village already historic, and a township long ago ploughed and planted. But each was engaged in the same struggle to preserve his artistic integrity against the encroachment of the world of affairs; to do the thing he was gifted to do, in spite of the entanglements of making a living, the disapproval of neighbors, and almost constant disappointments. Each was singularly successful in this endeavor, one of the noblest that a man may embark on. Audubon was more single-minded; he wanted to paint birds and he did, and he knew both success and fame at the end. Thoreau was more intellectualized, more divided, more torn by emotional and philosophical conflicts, but he attained the satisfaction of living as he wished, in simple integrity.

In the "Preview" to his biography of Thoreau, Henry Seidel Canby indicates the complex and many-sided nature of this man. For this particular study, let us enjoy him as an observer and matchless recorder of New England woods and waters. Only Emily Dickinson, in some of her poignant brief poems, has caught so precisely the clear colors and the infinite charm of that countryside, and Thoreau's is the richer picture. Robert Frost continues the tradition, in more measured and sophisticated terms, but none the less with the authentic flavor. For any one who has known familiarly the little roads, the lakes and the friendly woods of New England, these three writers are an unending source of pleasure.

1. Researcher into the Values of Living

Thoreau, by Henry Seidel Canby

Describe the many-sided Thoreau, as Canby presents him in his "Preview."

Discuss his essential conflict with his age and time. What did his family and friends expect of him? Did he know from the first what he wanted to do, as Audubon did?

Summarize and discuss the various influences that went into the making of Thoreau: his family, years at Harvard, friendship with the Emersons.

Canby divides his biography into two parts: "Adventurer in Life" and "Naturalist and Nature-Writer." A review of the book should follow this general plan, giving more emphasis here to the second half.

Comment on Emerson's remark that Thoreau "instead of engineering for all America . . . was the captain of a huckleberry party." Was his perversity justified?

What does Canby mean by a "researcher into the values of living"? Does Thoreau in this aspect have anything to say to the modern world?

An obituary of Thoreau in a Boston newspaper spoke of his "erect and spotless person." Does this seem exaggerated, or exact?

2. RETREAT TO THE WOODS

Walden, by Henry David Thoreau

Review Chapter 14 in Canby's biography as a background for an appreciation of *Walden.*

Walden is one of those books which may be most enjoyed when read in short portions, and returned to again and again. Its aphoristic and sententious style does not lend itself to skimming. Read at leisure, it expands in reflection as do the tightly compressed poems of Emily Dickinson. Select sections of it for discussion.

The first sections on Economy, Clothing, Shelter, are of especial interest to women, who are perhaps more cluttered than men with care for possessions. Discuss his theories.

What would Thoreau think of modern trends in architecture? In his desire to escape the encumbrances of possessions, was he running away from life, or accepting a larger reality?

Summarize the important chapter "Where I Lived and What I Lived for."

What do you learn about his literary tastes from the chapter on "Reading"? What other allusions to books are scattered through *Walden?*

Select one or two of the descriptive passages to read aloud, to illustrate his poetic and precise feeling for nature. Try the paragraphs beginning "The scenery of Walden is on a humble scale, in "The Ponds"; the last two paragraphs of the same chapter; the first two paragraphs of "Baker Farm," or that beginning "Our village life would stagnate . . ." in "Spring."

After reading these, or other selections, discuss Canby's statement that Thoreau was "next to Poe perhaps the most truly professional of great American writers."

Additional Reading:

The Flowering of New England, by Van Wyck Brooks.

CHAPTER IV

WESTWARD TRAILS

"The more and fresher the facts the better."
—JOHN BURROUGHS

It is the rare outdoorsman who has the artistic gifts of an Audubon or a Thoreau to enable him to transcribe his enjoyment of nature. From the high upland of poetic reality to which they led us, we have to return to a simpler and more frequented road whose tracing has been left by many hardy and adventurous souls.

Francis Parkman's New England background was very similar to that of Thoreau—village life, boyhood vagabondage in the woods, study at Harvard—and it falls within the same period of the mid-nineteenth century. In his writing he was never able to break away from the conventional rhetoric taught in classes in English composition, which Henry Seidel Canby comments on in his biography of Thoreau as a handicap against which the writer had to struggle until he had found his own style. Parkman's writing is as stilted as a Currier and Ives print, and as genuinely nineteenth-century American in flavor. The somewhat cramped style is, however, made vivid by the freshness and reality of his subject matter, and by his scientific reverence for facts. These sinewy accounts of the opening up of the great West may serve here as a balance for the occasionally lush and sentimental style indulged in by some nature writers. In *The Oregon Trail* Parkman has portrayed in all exactitude frontier America, in the era of Indian fights and the steadily westward-moving covered wagons. It is as real a part of our inheritance as Audubon's Kentucky and Louisiana, or Thoreau's New England.

Enos Mills followed Parkman's trail a half-century later. He is the first nature writer studied here who used the camera to enrich and amplify his record, and he used it skilfully, even though he lacked the improvements that later science has learned. Herbert Faulkner West says of him "Like all good nature writers, he combined scientific knowledge with poetic interpretation."

1. "A TOUR OF CURIOSITY AND AMUSEMENT"

The Oregon Trail, by Francis Parkman

Summarize the note on Parkman's life and work at the beginning of this edition.

Note the time of the journey, and trace its direction on a map.

Select some episodes of frontier life for especial comment, such as "Scenes at Ft. Laramie" or "The Ogillah Village."

Describe some of the characters; Deslauriers, Chatillon, etc.

Comment on his descriptions of Indian characters and custom. Are these pictures more or less realistic than those of Fenimore Cooper?

Discuss his observations of nature, his eye for detail, his pleasure in beauty. Note that these descriptions, while conventional and in accord with nineteenth century writing, are nevertheless accurate and convincing. See especially: "The Valley of the Platte," "Passage of the Mountains," "The Lonely Journey."

Why has this account of Parkman's Journey been considered a minor classic?

2. "LIFE, LIBERTY, AND THE PURSUIT OF INSECTS"

Bird Memories of the Rockies, by Enos A. Mills

The Introduction gives an interesting sketch of the author's life. Compare it with the lives of other nature writers studied here.

It has been said that Mills tended to humanize nature. Do you find traces of that? Another nature writer, not studied in this program but familiar to most of us from childhood, Ernest Thompson Seton, always endowed his animals with a human capacity for drama and tragedy. Compare Mills with him in that regard; see the chapter on "The Individuality of Birds."

"Adventures of a Tree" should be discussed for the picture it gives of the forests of the Rockies; "Guardians of the Forest" amplifies this.

"Birds know no boundary lines." Discuss his study of migration in "With Famous Travelers." You may want to return to it later when you read what John Burroughs and William Beebe write about migration.

3. ALONG THE CONTINENTAL DIVIDE

The Spell of the Rockies, by Enos A. Mills

The first chapter is a good adventure story, almost in the vein of *The Oregon Trail.* Give a brief account of it.

Discuss the importance of beavers as "conservationists."

Amplify the author's statement that "the tree is what enables our race to make a living and to live comfortably." What does he say about the wastefulness of forest fires? What is being done in your own state about forest conservation?

Read and discuss some of the passages that show the author's enjoyment of nature, and his careful observation.

Comment on the fact that both he and Parkman appreciate exteriors, but are not led by nature into philosophic contemplations, as Thoreau was.

Additional Reading:

Wild Animal Homesteads, by Enos A. Mills.

American Memory, by Henry Beston.

"A Buffalo Herd," by John Charles Fremont, p. 312-314.

"The Rocky Mountains," by John Charles Fremont, p. 314.

CHAPTER V

GLORIOUS EXCURSION

"... He must have a continent for his playground. He starts off for a walk after graduation and walks from Wisconsin to Florida and is not back home in eighteen years.... Probably the truest lover of nature, as she appears in woods, mountains, glaciers, we have yet had."

—JOHN BURROUGHS, writing of John Muir

"I wandered away on a glorious botanical and geological excursion, which has lasted nearly fifty years, and is not yet completed," says John Muir at the close of his *Story of My Boyhood and Youth*. His journals, selections from which make up *John of the Mountains*, are the record of that excursion; the record of a long life filled to the end with unflagging enthusiasm for and dedication to the beauty of the outdoor world. He had the same singleness of purpose which characterized Audubon. "All my life," he says, "I have been growing fonder and fonder of wild places." The mountains became his favorite wild place; he could never be long away from them, and his interpretations of them belong with the classics of American nature writing.

Indeed, even more than Joaquin Miller, Muir deserves to be called "the poet of the Sierras." Much of his prose, especially in his journals in which he felt free to speak from the heart, is so exalted in tone as to be more genuinely poetic than conventional verse. He has Whitman's cosmic sense of the vastness of this country; he likes grand words, and is not afraid of using them in describing grand scenery. Although he never fails to set down the blooming and the exact tint of each tiny Compositae or moss or fern, his real love is for the great peaks, the slow majesty of glaciers, the long rhythms of clouds and mists and changing light. No one has so profoundly felt, nor so well expressed the grandeur of the Rocky Mountains.

1. BOYHOOD OF A NATURALIST

Story of My Boyhood and Youth, by John Muir

The first sentence gives the keynote, not only of this book, but of his whole life.

Give a short account of his years in Scotland.

What were his first impressions of the New World? Notice that he had read some of the Scotch ornithologist Wilson's descriptions of American birds.

Chapters III-VI describe his life on a Wisconsin farm. Summarize them, emphasizing the advantages and influences that encouraged his bent to be a naturalist.

The last two chapters deal with his book-education, always with him secondary to the education of the wilderness. What did he learn at the University in preparation for his future career? Compare the cost of his university career with present day costs. Comment on his inventions.

2. MOUNTAIN THOUGHTS

John of the Mountains; the Unpublished Journals of John Muir, edited by Linnie Marsh Wolfe

The Introduction supplements the autobiography of his early years. Present the main facts as given here.

For reviewing, follow the main divisions of the journals, telling something of each section: Sheepherding, Exploring the Yosemite, the Sierra, the San Joaquin River, Journeys to Alaska, Home Life on the Ranch, Work for the establishment of national parks.

What aspect of nature appealed to him most? Note his interest in waterfalls, in great trees, in glaciers, above all in the mountains.

What geologic facts did he establish by his exploration of the Yosemite?

State and discuss his ideas about recreation. How do they apply to the present time?

Comment on his exalted and poetic prose. Certain sections read like complete poems (e.g. "Indian Summer" on p. 97). Read some of these aloud to give an idea of his style.

How much of his personal life does he reveal?

Illustrate the profoundly religious attitude in his worship of nature.

Note the reference to John Burroughs in his account of the Harriman expedition. The poem to Burroughs reveals a sense of humor which is not always apparent in the journals. Our study of Burroughs' journals will reveal interesting differences in these two great lovers of nature.

Summarize the contributions of Muir's long and fruitful life.

CHAPTER VI

THE GRACE TO SEE

"Lo, his hands grow kind
With touching beauty, and his heart aware
Of curious things . . .
He asks no grace except the grace to see."
—GLADYS CROMWELL

The reader who lives for a while with such great nature writers as Muir and Burroughs, Fairchild and Beebe, must be impressed with the richness and fullness of their lives; what a good life! one is moved to exclaim, tracing their ever-growing enjoyment and understanding of the world about them. They have within an inexhaustible source of delight and peace, and from this same source they are able to draw increased knowledge to share with others.

The long life of John Burroughs, like that of Muir, illustrates well the spiritual rewards which accrue to those who "ask no grace except the grace to see." His interest in nature writing began as an escape from the "iron wall" in front of his desk in Washington; it was an instinctive turning to a source of renewal and refreshment. It led him to far places and to many friends during his life time, and to an extension of his personality in the lives of all those who have had their imaginations quickened and their souls refreshed by his books. His philosophy is summed up in his poem called "Waiting," written toward the end of his life:

Serene I fold my hands and wait
  Nor care for wind nor tide nor sea;
I rave no more 'gainst time or fate
  For, lo! my own shall come to me.

* * *

The waters know their own and draw
  The brook that springs in yonder heights:
So flows the good with equal law
  Unto the soul of pure delights.

1. "AN APPRENTICESHIP TO THE TRUTH"

The Heart of Burroughs' Journals, edited by Clara Barrus

The Preface by the Editor and the Chronological Table offer a valuable introduction to a study of Burroughs; there is also considerable biographical material in the editor's notes in parenthesis at the beginning of each section.

Note that his age at the time of writing each section is given at the top of the page. Trace the development of his style and thought.

What reflections of contemporary events, such as the Civil War, Spanish American War, and World War I, do you find in these journals? Were there any such comments in Muir's journals? Which of the two men is more genuinely the hermit and mystic?

Trace the major literary influences in Burroughs' writing. Note that he is the most literary of any of the writers we have studied so far. His remarks on *Walden* are especially interesting.

Burroughs was a man of many friends, who knew most of the interesting people of his time. Give his account of some of them.

He was one of the first to appreciate Walt Whitman, and to have the courage to say so, in an age when Whitman was thought of as a reprobate and no poet. Discuss his comments on Whitman, scattered throughout the journals. See also "The Flight of the Eagle" in *Birds and Poets*.

Compare the aspects of nature which especially appealed to Burroughs with those which aroused the worship of Muir. They are as different as the parts of the country involved. Note that Burroughs' pleasure in nature is confined to the northeastern part of the United States. He is even, by his own confession, unable to see the mountains at Tryon.

Burroughs reveals more of his personal life here than does Muir. Comment on his religious feeling.

Describe some of his travels.

Sum up, as you did in the case of Muir, the activities and achievements of his long life.

2. AN INVITATION TO THE STUDY OF BIRDS

Wake-Robin, by John Burroughs

"How my mind reacted from the iron wall in front of me!" Tell his own story of the origins of his interest in nature.

Why did he call this book "Wake Robin"?

As in the case of Audubon, Burroughs is almost as much interested in flowers as in birds. Give instances of this.

Read and comment on his interpretation of the song of the hermit thrush in the chapter called "In the Hemlocks." This chapter is the one most filled with the author's detailed and leisurely and observant enjoyment of the woods; everything is noted from partridge berry to humming bird. Reading it is like a cool walk through the northern woods. See also "Birch Browsings," which has the same quality.

"The Adirondacks," written in 1866, is interesting now as a picture of the region before it was overrun with hotels and summer camps.

"Spring at the Capitol" is a sketch of Washington in the tragic years of 1863-1865. How much of war does he reflect here?

Additional Reading:

Birds and Poets, by John Burroughs.

CHAPTER VII

NATURE AS AN AVOCATION

> "When I hear people say that they have not found the world, or life, so interesting as to be in love with it I am apt to think they have never . . . seen with clear vision the world they think so meanly of, nor anything in it, not even a blade of grass."
>
> —W. H. HUDSON

In every age there are a few men who seem able to multiply their personalities through achievements in many different fields; truly universal men, in the Renaissance sense of the word. The late John Buchan, Lord Tweedsmuir, was such a one: historian, biographer, statesman, fisherman, novelist, and creator of thrilling spy stories. A friend tells of finding him while convalescing from an illness reading three books and correcting proof for a fourth. Ray Stannard Baker had a similar ability to do a great many different things extremely well; he was newspaperman, editor, advisor at the Versailles Peace Conference, author of the official *Life and Letters* of Woodrow Wilson. He belongs in the goodly company of nature writers by virtue of the delightful series of outdoor books which he wrote under the pen name of David Grayson—a further extension of his personality. *Adventures in Contentment, The Friendly Road,* and others are a personal record of his escape from the tensions and pressures of a crowded life in long country walks and loving observation of nature. While never as scientific or as detailed as other writers studied here, he is one with them in appreciation and enjoyment. Through his own release, told with charming simplicity, he has shown thousands of others a way to sanctuary and renewal. His nature books make good reading for these troubled times, especially because they are the expression of a strong and realistic personality, for whom escape was never more than temporary.

In his autobiography, whose sub-title *The Book of My Youth* describes it accurately, he gives the origins and influences that shaped his extraordinary career. This story of a Wisconsin boyhood and of a young man's early struggle has the fresh coloring of youth and the frontier.

The Countryman's Year is a sample of the unhurried enjoyment of nature for which he found time throughout his busy life. It

should be read if possible in connection with either *The Friendly Road* or *Adventures in Contentment,* which, although unfortunately out of print, are available in most libraries.

1. THE MAKING OF A NATURE WRITER

Native American: The Book of My Youth, by Ray Stannard Baker

Describe Wisconsin as young Baker saw it. How does his description of the frontier compare with the earlier one by Parkman in *The Oregon Trail?*

The account of family relationships is a particularly happy one. Comment on his attitude toward his parents, his aunts, his brothers.

Discuss some of the early influences which gave his personality its especial shape and coloring.

What was the influence of Dr. Beal? What valuable attribute of a writer as well as of a naturalist did Baker learn from him?

Mention some of the writers who influenced him.

Describe the beginnings as told here of his pleasure in long walks.

What origins are suggested here for the humanitarianism of his career? His interest in social change?

Compare this story of a Wisconsin boyhood with John Muir's.

Sum up the manifold aspects of his personality as indicated in these years of his youth.

2. THE QUIET WAY

The Countryman's Year, by David Grayson

Note that the locale here is New England, as in so many of the books we have studied. It is worth remembering that Emily Dickinson also lived in Amherst.

Although in the form of a journal, these notes are evidently worked over with care, and are more literary in flavor than for instance the journals of John Muir, which were written for his own eyes rather than for publication. Compare them.

Where lies his chief interest in nature: in aesthetic enjoyment and spiritual comfort, or scientific observation?

How does what you learn of the author here tally with his autobiography? What does his journal reveal of his personality? His likes and beliefs?

Additional Reading:

The Friendly Road, by David Grayson
Adventures in Contentment, by David Grayson

CHAPTER VIII

THE FAR VIEW AND THE NEAR

"All around him Patmos lies
Who hath spirit-gifted eyes,
Who his happy sight can suit
To the great and the minute."

—Edith Thomas

No one can read David Fairchild's *The World Was My Garden* in these days of global tragedy without reflecting on the contrast between the world as this international scientist sees it, and as Hitler sees it, or as the headlines force everyone to see it today. For David Fairchild the whole world was a realm to be explored, an invitation to discovery, undeterred by national boundaries or prejudices. Without let or hindrance, he visited Germany and Japan, Norway and Spain, Java and the South Seas. Today, when vast areas of the world are blocked off, not only actually, but psychologically and emotionally, it arouses a nostalgic envy to travel with this man for whom the round earth was in very truth "one world." It arouses too the wish that this spirit of communal interest in learning, in discovery of the wonders and treasures of the world, might transcend the spirit of national hate.

David Fairchild's view of the world is far-ranging and all-inclusive in its scope. Edwin Teale, on the other hand, initiates the reader into the tiny world of the nearby, the miraculous commonplace. *Grassroot Jungles,* in a more exact and scientific but also very imaginative way, belongs in the world of *Memoirs of a Midget;* to appreciate it fully you must become small enough to look up to the point of a blade of grass. Here the camera is used in all its magic power, as the skilled interpreter and illustrator of the nature writer.

1. Man's Civilization and Nature's

The World Was My Garden, by David Fairchild

Review his childhood recollections of the Michigan forest, and the early awakening of his interest in natural science. What led him to specialize in plant diseases?

Comment on his meeting with John Burroughs.

His descriptions of Europe in the nineties, the times of his visits to

Germany and Italy, have especial interest now. This was the international world of science which once seemed to hold out a promise of abolishing war.

Discuss some of his other journeys: to Java, to the West Indies and South America, to northern Europe.

Note the variety of his interests in people, folkways, strange lands, as well as plants.

Are there any premonitions of war in his observations of Japan? Give the story of the Japanese cherry trees in Washington, as he tells it here.

Describe the purpose and achievements of his travels.

"I return through the woods. Soon fences and plowed fields and a notice warning trespassers bring back the complications of a man-made world." Discuss the inner meaning of this, the closing sentence of the book. When will we be able to take down our international fences?

Additional Reading:

Garden Islands of the Great East, by David Fairchild. A delightful account of his travels in the Southwest Pacific, just on the brink of war.

2. A GULLIVER'S JOURNEY INTO ANOTHER WORLD

Grassroot Jungles, by Edwin Way Teale

Give a summary of the first chapter: the size and variety of the insect world: importance to human life: unexplained riddles.

State his definition of insects, and basic description of insect life.

Note the harmony of writing and pictures all the way through; especially in such chapters as "Winged Bullets."

Show the photographs that illustrate the text as fluidly and poetically as if they were paintings or sketches. They are an integral part of this nature writer's skill. Here is the exquisite texture of the dragon fly's wing and the mallow's petal.

The author's description of the migration of the monarch butterfly is one of his most successful pieces of writing. Read it aloud as a sample of his suggestive style.

Why does the author consider the life of the bumblebee a "rather strange one"?

Describe the long life-cycle of the cicada.

Note the first few paragraphs of Chapter XIII, "Beauty and the Beast," for examples of poetic insight.

Select other sections for special attention: e.g. "Flying Rainbows," "The Homeless Ladybug," "Night Singers."

Comment on the author's combination of poetry and scientific precision, the mark of the real nature writer.

CHAPTER IX

A VARIOUS LANGUAGE

"To him who in the love of nature holds
Communion with her visible forms, she speaks
A various language."

—BRYANT

Except for Audubon's wanderings into Louisiana and Kentucky, and John Muir's stroll into Florida, most of the books studied here have dealt with either New England or the lands beyond the Mississippi. It is a strange fact that very little nature writing has come out of the South—strange because naturalists from André Michaux and Bartram to the present have acclaimed the richness and variety of plant and animal life to be found in southern woods and mountains. Herbert Ravenel Sass is a notable exception to this general lack. His delightful books take us to the country beloved by Sidney Lanier,

"... the heavenly woods and glades
That run to the radiant marginal sand beach within
The wide sea marshes of Glynn."

He introduces the reader to forests very different in their mystery and aloofness from the cool birch groves of John Burroughs, and to an extraordinarily interesting variety of strange and exotic birds. His very genuine love for the Low Country enables him to put into words some of the magic of those unfrequented lagoons, shadowed by cypress and live oaks.

William Brewster's journals take us back to the New England of Thoreau and the long tradition of observing and writing about nature. These notes were not written for publication, but for his own pleasure and information. They were edited and published after his death. Although he was always more scientific observer than conscious literary artist, these day-by-day records of his excursions into wood and field have flashes of real beauty and poetry, and bear witness to his life-long enjoyment of the world about him. They have a peculiar interest too in the fact that the scene of his wanderings was the same that Thoreau knew.

1. Sea Island Magic

Adventures in Green Places, by Herbert Ravenel Sass

In studying and reporting on this book, note all the way through how different are the scenes it depicts and the birds it describes from any we have read so far. Emphasize this variety.

Describe the "egret cities." Notice at the end of this chapter his lovely account of the dance of the herons.

His observations on the barrier islands of the Carolina coast should be sketched, with their reference to sea turtles, alligators, bald eagles, and wild cats. What does he say of the length of time eagles inhabit the same nest?

Comment on how he interweaves here the legends of old houses of the Low Country, memories of Indian lore, and tales of pirates. These stories give the book a unique flavor.

"The Broad Blue Road" is an interesting record of migration from this point of observation. It should be compared with other accounts of migration studied in this program. Discuss his phrase "that ancient wonderful highway which is more ancient and more wonderful than any of the roads of man."

What does he mean by a "garden naturalist"? Does this chapter seem out of tune with the rest of the book?

Comment on the one chapter in which he leaves the Low Country for an excursion into the mountains, "Ahow'he of the Overhills."

Illustrate his statement that Nature will "shatter now and then the most firmly fixed of rules" . . . "For she is a whimsical goddess when all is said and done; and therein lies, for all who are in any true sense her lovers, half at least . . . of her mystical, ageless charm." Does this apply to other books in this program?

Additional Reading:

Home by the River, by Archibald Rutledge. (Some fine descriptions of the Low Country, with more emphasis on the house than outdoors.)

2. Where Thoreau Led

October Farm, by William Brewster

Concord River, by William Brewster

Describe the Introduction to *October Farm*, by Daniel Chester French, which gives the author's background.

These are not books to be read straight through, but to be dipped into here and there, as with a volume of poetry.

Keep in mind that these journals were not written for publication. They have on this account a spontaneity not to be found in more studied works. Select for comment some of the short passages from either book which show the author's enjoyment of beauty in all forms.

His major interest is obviously in birds. Is this also true of Herbert Ravenel Sass? Comment on the different kinds of birds which the two observe.

Using the map on the end papers of *Concord River*, mention some of the places which were familiar to both William Brewster and to Thoreau.

Brewster is especially sensitive to bird songs and skilled in describing them. Illustrate this by selections.

Study his notes on migration and compare them with those of other writers. Did he have as advantageous a position to observe migration as did Herbert Ravenel Sass? Account for the difference.

Comment on these two books of Brewster's as the record of a hobby which grew into a life-long enthusiasm and career. What effect did his interest in the outdoor world have on his own life?

CHAPTER X

A SEA CHANGE

"Colors, odors, sounds and sights; the island, sea, sky, and living creatures, all gloriously inter-existing in the three planes of our planet, and in the fourth dimension of enthusiastic human appreciation—all this has had to be entombed in black type upon flat paper."

—William Beebe

Naturalists, like poets, are people who expand and enlarge the ordinary limits of experience. Not content with surfaces, they must always push beyond into new worlds: they see more, hear more, comprehend more, than the average. Florence Page Jacques, in *Birds across the Sky*, tells the story of one amateur's expanding interest in birds, until from tiny moving blobs among the leaves they became highly individualized beings, with precise and lovely details of contour, coloring, and flight. William Beebe has stretched the boundaries of his world perhaps more dramatically and drastically than any other living naturalist, for he has explored the mysterious realms under water, which for many people have rather more dread than enchantment. He has made himself at home in a region more inaccessible and more alien to man than the remotest places of the earth's surface, and from that fabulous realm he has brought back glittering nuggets of information and adventure. Fortunately he is a very gifted writer who, in spite of his frequently expressed impatience with the clumsy medium of words, can convey to his readers the fresh wonder and excitement of his explorations. The result is something like a new *Water Babies* for grown-ups, with none of the magic diminished, but underlaid with the firm structure of scientifically observed and recorded fact.

1. "THE ETERNAL DESIRE TO KNOW"

Nonsuch: Land of Water, by William Beebe

Locate the island on a map.

Define the purpose of the author's studies and explorations at Nonsuch Island.

Describe his methods of going about it; his thoroughness, his enthusiasm.

The chapter on "The Cedars of Nonsuch" has been included in anthologies as an excellent example of this type of descriptive essay. Read aloud some selections from it.

Select other passages which illustrate the author's ability as a writer: his obvious ability as a scientist need not concern us here.

What does he mean by "almost island"? Describe his adventures there.

"The edges and rims of things are much more exciting than the things themselves." Show how this is a key sentence for the chapter called "Battlefield of the Shore."

The chapter on "Migration" gives in short space a profound and thought-provoking discussion of this mysterious phenomenon. Discuss its implications. It is particularly interesting in connection with the other bird books studied in this program. Note the author's sense of compassion toward the minor tragedies of migration.

"Feathered Tourists," as well as "Migration," shows Beebe's keen interest in other phases of nature besides under water. Give further instances.

2. THE MAGIC OF WATER

Half-Mile Down, by William Beebe

Note that the title of the first chapter contains the word "wonderer," not "wanderer"; why? Look carefully at the picture of "The First Wonderer," as a key to this whole book.

Summarize briefly Chapters 2-5, which give the antecedents and history of the Bathysphere.

Give his description (p. 109 ff) of the ocean at seven hundred feet down, which he and Barton were the first living men to behold. This is genuine adventure.

Recount some of their additional adventures.

The pictures are an integral part of this, as they are in many of these nature books. Take time to study them.

Comment on the additions to knowledge made by these explorations: "Nothing that our nets had produced had prepared me for as much life as I had seen."

CHAPTER XI

FOLLOWERS OF AUDUBON

"Birds seem to be the poetry of nature."
—Florence Page Jaques

The drama and rhythm and color of Audubon's procession of paintings are surely akin to the excitement of great poetry. Measured in these terms, Florence Page Jaques's essays about learning to know birds are poetry of a minor sort, but none the less pleasing and at times stirring. Her books have the added charm of an unusual partnership, with herself as narrator and her husband as skilled and sensitive illustrator; or perhaps it's the other way around, and her books are written around his illustrations, as Edwin Teale's are around his marvellous photographs. Reading *Birds across the Sky* is bound to make even the blindest and most self-immersed long for an increased acquaintance with these "little brothers," who seem to lead always to the widening enchantment of trees and skies and open waters.

While Florence Page Jaques introduces us to the minor poetry of bird lore, the friendly and elfin qualities of birds who are the familiars of flowers and woods, Louis Halle knows how to make us see the drama and the wild passion of soaring fighting birds. He follows Audubon here; the great painter was harshly criticized in his own time for depicting cruelty and lust and vengeance as well as beauty; he never prettified nature, in the manner that so often appealed to his era. The birds Louis Halle likes to write about are hawks and the great birds of the sea, albatrosses, gulls, and terns, and his stories about them are full of realistic understanding of these wild lives. His book is a long way from some of the nature observations we have studied; it is a carefully composed literary creation, planned and plotted like a novel, and with a novel's structure and suspense.

1. BIRDS AS FRIENDS

Birds Across the Sky, by Florence Page Jaques

What personal equipment did the author bring to her initiation as an amateur ornithologist? Her somewhat arduous following of her husband's profession reminds the reader of the shy and dreamy Anne Lindbergh learning the techniques of flying. If you have read *North to the Orient,* or *Listen, the Wind* compare them with this.

What sort of life did the Jaques succeed in making out of this preoccupation with the outdoor world of birds? Does it seem to you an escape from experience, or a heightening of experience?

Trace the steps in the author's gradually increasing appreciation of birds, from the first kingfisher to "little Jay" and the great flight of geese in the last chapter.

Describe some of the high spots in her experience: the canoe trips, the Gaspé, England, Switzerland, Panama.

Illustrate how the author's sense of humor helps her to avoid the sentimental in descriptions, and how her sense of poetry enlivens these descriptions.

The final chapter is an excellent climax to a carefully planned book.

2. BIRDS AS FIGHTERS

Birds Against Men, by Louis Halle

Comment on the significant word "against" in the title. It tells a great deal about the author's attitude and interest.

Compare the first chapter "Arrival from the South" with John Burroughs' note on the return of birds in *Wake-Robin,* and with William Beebe's observations on migration in *Nonsuch.*

Two of the chapters are lively short stories, full of drama. Tell the life histories of Akbar and Lorenzo. Does he fall into the error, previously discussed, of endowing his birds with human traits?

The chapter on sea birds deserves especial discussion. Note that the waterfowl described in the Jaques book are mostly those that live near shore, but these are the wild birds of the open sea.

What in the author's experience prepared him especially for writing the final chapter? This description of a lost city of the Mayas in the Guatemalan jungle shows him at his best.

Notice how the Lynd Ward drawings catch the dramatic intensity of Louis Halle's writing.

Contrast his observations of birds, and his manner of writing about them, with Florence Page Jaques.

CHAPTER XII

SANCTUARY

"Whatever comes to pass in our human world, there is no shadow of us cast upon the rising of the sun, no pause in the flowing of the wind or the long rhythms of the sea."

—HENRY BESTON

In this brief review of nature writing in the United States we have met many diverse personalities—artists, poets, mystics, historians, scientists, statesmen; those who worship nature in her more grandiose aspects, and those who are fascinated by the pattern of leaf veinings or the tiny music of an insects' wings. But through all these varied observations and writings there runs a note of agreement like a major theme: that in the study of nature is to be found healing, sanctuary, and recompense. To obtain this reward, most of these writers have felt the need, at some time or other, to be alone outdoors, to withdraw from ordinary routines and live awhile in solitude. We have followed Thoreau to Walden, John Muir to the forest of the Yosemite, and now Richard Byrd to the vastest solitude of all. These withdrawals have in every case been fruitful not only in the writer's sense of peace and satisfaction, but also in increased scientific knowledge and in books that share the experience with their readers.

This impulse was undoubtedly one of the motives behind Richard Byrd's decision to stay all winter at an advanced base in the Antarctic. Beyond the wish to make meteorological observations, to prove that man could keep alive at temperatures of appalling cruelty, was the basic need to be alone, to think things out in solitude and to know the real meaning of silence. His story of that experiment is a unique combination of adventure and awed interpretation of nature in her wildest mood.

When he decided to spend a year alone on the great beach of Cape Cod, Henry Beston was not moved by any desire to contribute to science; his wish was to enjoy and to behold. In spite of the New England atmosphere of the book, Beston belongs to the school of Muir rather than of Thoreau or Burroughs; his concern is with the grander manifestations of nature, the sweep of tides and the march of clouds, the great symphonies of light and darkness. For his retreat he turned to the best possible place in all

New England to observe the pageants of sky and sea—the outer shore of Cape Cod. *The Outermost House* seems an appropriate close for this program, not only because it contains some of the best writing about nature to be found in any of these books, but also for its emphasis on the timeless changing beauty of the world.

1. SOLITUDE UNMAPPED

Alone, by Richard Byrd

State the reasons as given here for Admiral Byrd's decision to go to the advanced base alone; discuss the criticisms that have been made of him for this, and the validity of his own reasoning.

Describe the preparations for the expedition; the material arrangements at Advance Base. Note the two minor but important items missing, in spite of the elaborate preparations.

What was his daily routine? Comment on the importance of routine in a day that might otherwise be formless.

Give some of his descriptions of the outward aspects of nature—storms, snow drifts, crevasses, the Antarctic skies. His observations of auroras are among the best parts of the book.

Note the two planes on which the book takes place: the outward life of a practical explorer, and the inner searching of an individual for spiritual meaning. Discuss this latter phase. What did he find in his hours of solitude? Faith? An understanding of himself? Of life? We find a similar combination of adventure and mysticism in an even more highly endowed writer, Antoine de St. Exupéry. Compare these two writers from this point of view.

Give a brief account of Byrd's rescue. Summarize the achievements of his experiment.

2. "A WORLD BEYOND THE VIOLENCE OF MEN"

The Outermost House, by Henry Beston

The author's preface gives a reason for reading this book in wartime. What is it?

Using the map, locate the "Fo'castle" on Cape Cod Beach. A larger map will help in showing its relation to the rest of the coast.

The first chapter gives a short geological history of the Cape, one of the most highly individual regions of the East. Give his account of this information.

Note the author's sensitive ear for all the sounds of nature, from insects to the roar of the surf. Give illustrations.

He is remarkably successful in describing the movements of waves.

See especially Chapter III, "The Headlong Wave," as well as throughout the book.

Comment on his account of a shipwreck. Touches like this make the book a picture of a locality as well as a description of outdoor life.

What birds does he observe on the Cape? What migratory habits does he notice?

The paragraph on page 176, beginning "Learn to reverence night . . ." sums up much of his philosophy. Examine it carefully.

Discuss also the last three paragraphs of the book, which set forth the values he found in his year alone. They may well be taken as a commentary on this whole group of nature writers; a summary of what the reader may find in these books.

"He need not afar remove
He need not the times reprove
Who would hold perpetual lease
Of an isle in seas of peace."

—EDITH THOMAS

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